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XVIII.—FOURTEEN UNPUBLISHED LETTERS BY
HENRY CRABB ROBINSON; A CHAPTER IN
HIS APPRECIATION OF GOETHE

Henry Crabb Robinson¹ occupies a unique position in the history of literary relations between England and Germany. He exerted influence in both directions, tho his greatest service consisted in making Englishmen acquainted with German literature. While a student in Germany from 1800 to 1805, he interpreted English ideas diplomatically among the Germans, whenever the opportunity presented itself; and, after his return to England, he labored incessantly for the rest of his life, over sixty years, to create a more general taste for German works of art, especially for the works of Goethe, among his own countrymen. Indeed, he came to be considered by many literary men and women, both in England and on the Continent, as an oracle, well worth consulting on matters

¹ Henry Crabb Robinson (1775-1867): English diarist, journalist, conversationalist, translator, and barrister-at-law. He was one of the founders of the Athenæum Club and of University College, London. His *Diary, Reminiscences, and Correspondence*, edited by Thomas Sadler, and first published in London in 1869, is his best known literary legacy and forms a most fascinating and valuable source of information for the student of contemporary English and German literature. There is an American edition published in Boston by Houghton, Mifflin & Co., 1877, to which references here are made. Cf. also the following articles by Jean-Marie Carré: *Quelques lettres inédites de William Taylor, Coleridge et Carlyle à Henry Crabb Robinson sur la littérature allemande*, *Revue Germanique* (1912), pp. 34-49; *Un ami et un défenseur de Goethe en Angleterre; H. C. Robinson*, pp. 385-415 of the same volume; 'The Characteristics of Goethe' de Sarah Austin et la collaboration de H. C. Robinson, *Archiv für das Studium der neueren Sprachen*, cxxxi, pp. 145-152; and, in the same volume, *William Whewell et H. C. Robinson*, pp. 425-427.

English or German, even on European affairs in general. It was Crabb Robinson who taught Madame de Staël her first lessons in German philosophy; and this same Robinson, during his third visit to Germany in 1829, astonished Goethe by his extraordinary knowledge of modern German literature and life.² On the other hand, Goethe was glad to hear him read Byron, Milton, and Coleridge in the original. In England his position was much the same. Not only many minor writers sought and obtained his aid, but both Coleridge and Carlyle, in their studies of German literature, obtained many helpful suggestions from Crabb Robinson. He was always ready to lend a helping hand to all who wanted it, and sometimes to those who did not. Robinson's influence was chiefly personal, to be sure; but the personal influence of a man who loved his subject was needed under the circumstances, and was salutary, even tho the man was somewhat importunate.³

Moreover, Robinson was not a mere enthusiast. He was blessed with a long, healthy life and a healthy mind; he possessed an unselfish and cosmopolitan character; tho not rich, he was a man of tolerably independent means, so

² Goethe writes to Zelter, Aug. 20, 1829: "Zu gleicher Zeit war ein Engländer bey uns, der zu Anfang des Jahrhunderts in Jena studirt hatte und seit der Zeit der deutschen Literatur gefolgt war, auf eine Weise von der man sich gar keinen Begriff machen konnte. Er war so recht in *merita causæ* unsrer Zustände initiirt, dasz ich ihm, wenn ich auch gewollt hätte, und wie man wohl gegen Fremde zu thun pflegt, keinen blauen phraseologischen Dunst vor die Augen bringen durfte."

³ The unfavorable attitude of Walter Bagehot toward the personal influence of "old Crabb" is easily understood; he knew Robinson as an old man only. At the well-known breakfasts which Robinson often gave for his friends, there seems to have been very little breakfast served, according to Bagehot, but much Goethe and Schiller. Cf. Bagehot, *Henry Crabb Robinson, The Fortnightly Review*, XII (1869), pp. 179 ff.

that he could afford a happy combination of leisure and industry; he was an omnivorous reader in many subjects; he had a natural gift for languages, for the art of conversation, and for writing memoirs, and thru his extensive travels had acquired a large variety of experiences and made many intimate associations. In spite of his rather dispassionate mind, Robinson was a keen and sober judge of human character and an accurate observer, and was scrupulously careful in recording observations. The degree of his tolerance is almost incredible, and his simplicity, his objectivity in description, and, above all, his extraordinary wide circle of distinguished literary friends of all nations, gave his opinions exceptional value. In discussing a contemporary work of art, whether English or foreign, he could almost always claim first-hand acquaintance with both the work and the author; and there is no doubt that Robinson knew the Weimar group of poets better than any other Englishman.

In view of such facts we are not surprised to find the following entry in Robinson's *Reminiscences* for April, 1832:

Early in April an occupation was found me, which lasted about a year, and which flattered me with the notion that I was not altogether useless. I received an application from William J. Fox, then editor of the *Monthly Repository*, now M. P. from Oldham in Lancashire, to furnish him with a paper on Goethe. I was flattered by the application, though accompanied by the intimation that the editor could not afford to pay. I gladly undertook the task, and made the offer, readily accepted on his part, to furnish a catalogue *raisonné* of all Goethe's works.*

Undoubtedly Crabb Robinson was the only man in England who was both able and willing to undertake a work of that kind as a pure labor of love.⁵ To furnish to an

*Cf. *Diary*, II, p. 171.

⁵ Whether Robinson later received any recompense for his labor, I have been unable to determine; it seems improbable.

English public of 1832 even a "catalogue" of all Goethe's works was not a small matter, and the task proved arduous. But Robinson did his best and "a paper on Goethe," dealing with his life, appeared in the *Monthly Repository* in May, 1832. It was followed by nine papers on Goethe's works (published in nine numbers of the periodical), the last in April, 1833. Then in the March number, 1834, Robinson reviewed Sarah Austin's *Characteristics of Goethe*, making eleven articles in all. The following fourteen letters by Robinson, now a part of the William A. Speck⁶ collection of Goethiana in Yale University, are all addressed to Rev. William J. Fox⁷ (Stamford Grove, Upper Clapton), editor of the *Monthly Repository*, and deal with the publication of the above-mentioned articles.

Even to-day the articles have more than a mere historical import, altho Robinson himself never pretended that they would have any great critical value; his sole intention was to arouse, if possible, more general interest in Goethe, by giving, as he said, a catalogue of his works. However, Robinson's letters dealing with this catalogue contain much that is worthy of note. The fact that they were written to a private individual allowed, of course, a freedom of speech which is not always found in articles written for publication. Besides what is explicit in these messages, much can be read between the lines. We learn not a little of Robinson himself, of his unbounded admiration for Goethe,

⁶ Mr. William A. Speck, the present owner and curator of the collection which bears his name, has kindly placed these letters at my disposal and rendered valuable assistance in the preparation of this article.

⁷ Fox was originally a Unitarian clergyman, his periodical was Unitarian in sympathy, and its readers were composed to a great extent of Unitarians. In 1832 the *Monthly Repository*, which had been both literary and theological from the beginning, had also assumed a political character.

and of the attitude of literary contemporaries in England toward German literature. But the dominant tone of them is this: it is a delicate problem to introduce Goethe's writings to a public which neither is prepared for Goethe nor cares for him. This is not astonishing, but it is significant, nevertheless, when one recalls what had been done, and what was being done at the time by a select few, to introduce German literature into England. I refer to William Taylor of Norwich, to Coleridge, Carlyle, Walter Scott, and to the various translators of *Faust*.

The letters follow in chronological order, and with all the peculiarities of the original form.

I

My dear Sir

I should have great pleasure indeed in writing about G  the did I not feel most strongly that it is a task far above my strength,⁸ nevertheless I will send you something that without pretending to be a *critical*⁹ article may serve to gratify your readers. The appreciation of G  the's poetical and philosophical character will be a problem on which the first spirits of the two or three next generations will delight to exercise themselves. It would be presumptuous in any living Englishman (except perhaps Coleridge) to attempt such a work. And Coleridge has not the requisite *love*. Carlyle would perhaps succeed better than any other. Our friend William Taylor will I hope abstain from the attempt.¹⁰

I am very truly yours

2 Plowden Buildings Temple

H. C. Robinson.

5 April 1832.

⁸ Crabb Robinson was notoriously modest.

⁹ Words in italics are underscored in the original.

¹⁰ William Taylor of Norwich published in 1830 *Historic Survey of German Poetry* in three volumes. It was an important undertaking, historically, being the first of its kind in England, and it contained some good translations, but its intrinsic value, as a whole, was mediocre. Lack of sufficient knowledge, serious omissions, and poor critical judgment were the most common charges against the *Survey*. A disproportionately large amount of space is devoted to

This letter explains itself. In the next one we must assume that Robinson had written his article on the life of Goethe, which appeared, as stated above, in the May number of the *Monthly Repository*, and was busy writing his first article on Goethe's works for the following number. In the first paragraph, we get an insight into his practical turn of mind.

II

My dear Sir

I hope it will not annoy you, my writing on *slips*. I know it is a convenient mode for the printer if not the reader. It is the only way that I can write on account of my indolence. One can cut and change and put before and after which is a wonderful convenience.

I hope there is some matter not altogether bad and to the English reader certainly new in what I have written. It amounts to about 8 pages and therefore it may be as well not to insert the verses in this N[umber].¹¹ Tho' they would suit the present article very well. If however the copy be shorter than I suppose and you have room for them in this N[umber] I can send them with a simple sentence of introduction. I doubt very much whether what I write will be to the taste of your readers or any other readers, but when I have finished without going on with the same minuteness which the articles will not require, it will be a something which does not exist elsewhere. The subsequent numbers will be much more of a catalogue.

You must not forget at the end of the Volume to correct an erratum—tho' I do not think it fair to ascribe it to the printer—*Philip August* which should be *Louis Philip*!¹² An unpardonable blunder. I am too apt to write A when I mean B. It is necessary to watch me closely.

Very truly yours,

H. C. R.

19th May 1832

Send me the proof sheets as before. I am always at home in the morning and I won't keep the Devil waiting if he comes between 9 and 11. Or they may be put in my letter box over night.

August von Kotzebue, whom Taylor believed to be greater than Goethe.

¹¹ That is, the *June* number, since this article is *printed* in the month following its composition. Sometimes, as in the account of *Faust*, there are two months between the date of writing and the

Robinson is as anxious about his readers as a modern stage manager is about his audience. He dares not hope for a very great success, but implies that the novelty of the undertaking will help the situation somewhat. This is also the tone of the next letter, plus another expression of Robinson's modesty. His second article on Goethe's works is now ready.

III

Dear Sir

I send you the article for this month [printed in July] very early that you may have time to consider one or two points. What say you to the printing the *text* of the first three poems? Prometheus, Ganymede and the Bounds of Humanity? In that case the article would not be longer as the original and translation¹² would be be-

time of printing. The "verses" in question were poems by Goethe, with translations, and were inserted in the July number. See next letter.

¹² See *Monthly Repository* for 1832, p. 302.

¹³ Concerning this translation we obtain some interesting information in the first sentence of Robinson's second article on Goethe's writings: "Our attempt to convey some idea of the nature of Goethe's poetry by an account of the contents of the first four volumes, is so unsatisfactory to ourselves, that we are desirous, before we proceed to another class of his writings, of presenting our readers with a few specimens of translation; and, for that purpose, with permission of the translator, we will reprint a few articles which appeared nearly thirty years ago, in a work of very confined circulation, and entirely forgotten now." See *Monthly Repository* for 1832, p. 460.

There is no doubt that the translator mentioned here is none other than Robinson himself, and that the "work of very confined circulation" was the *Monthly Register* to which Robinson had contributed about thirty years before. He writes to his brother Thomas, in 1802: "One of my employments during a part of 1802-3 was that of contributor to a magazine entitled the *Monthly Register*, and edited by my friend [J. D.] Collier. The subjects on which I wrote were German literature, the philosophy of Kant, etc. I also gave many translations from Goethe, Schiller, and others, in order to exemplify the German theory of versification." See *Diary*, I, p. 87.

*side*¹⁴ each other. If you would like to do this I shall not mind the trouble of copying the original. I am surprised at the correctness of your [proof-]reader. There are no mistakes in the foreign words.

I have no wish to exceed the bounds of half a sheet¹⁵ in each number but in the present number I hope you will let these 7 articles¹⁶ appear. The *three* above-named *Mahomet's Song*, *Cupid the Landscape painter* and the *Wanderer*. Also the *drops of Nectar*, is a little gem.

I care less about the epigrams. If in fact the above did not exhaust the space to be filled in this number I should like to add a word or two on the Vols: 5 and 6.¹⁷ In order that with number 4¹⁸ may begin the Dramas. But this is of no consequence and therefore this part of the copy you will make either the end of the present number or the beginning of the next as you like. But it would not be worth while to continue the translations beyond the present number. Should I continue this catalogue thro' 3 or 4 further numbers, tho' no one can feel more strongly than I do how *mediocre* these things are, yet I think that there being nothing of the kind met with elsewhere, it ought to excite attention.

Your obliging direction to have some copies struck off for me has been probably misunderstood as they have not been sent me. I have written to your brother [Charles Fox, publisher] on the subject. If without trouble it could be done—(and the last number may be passed over)—it would enable me to send the whole article when complete to Mad. Göthe and one or two other German friends—in the form of a pamphlet.

I am very faithfully yours

12th June, 1832

H. C. Robinson.

Let me know in case you are willing to add¹⁹ a few small articles, epigrams, etc. I do not wish you to be troubled with getting other poems copied. The Volume may be taken to the printing-house. But if you consent to any other translations besides the seven I should like to look at the magazine²⁰ for a single morning.

P. S. I have received the copies, many thanks.

¹⁴ They are so printed in the July number.

¹⁵ That is, printer's sheet, signature.

¹⁶ Poems, giving both text and translation.

¹⁷ Volumes 5 and 6 of Goethe's works (*Vollständige Ausgabe letzter Hand*, in 40 volumes, the publication of which was begun in 1827). The second and third papers, the first and second on Goethe's works, dealt with the first four volumes, comprising Goethe's lyric poetry.

¹⁸ The catalogue of the dramas began in the middle of the third

It is a matter of interest that Robinson knew not only Goethe himself but the members of his household as well. During his student days he had seen Christiane when he visited Goethe, and now he corresponded with Ottilie,²¹ the widow of Goethe's son. This letter gives us additional evidence that Robinson intended to keep up his relation with Madame Goethe, even after the death of the poet, and keep her informed about his literary labors. For this reason, the following undated note by Robinson to Fox is introduced here. It corroborates what has been said by showing that Robinson made definite arrangements later to send a "parcel" to Ottilie, containing a literary "article." It is tolerably certain that the article mentioned is the one to which he refers in the preceding letter.

IV

My dear Sir

It happens singularly enough that a parcel is going off *Saturday afternoon* to Madame G the. And you will therefore oblige me much by letting me have two copies of the article, which I will send to her and Knebel²² (who wrote me the letter you saw). It will be I should hope an acceptable present. I should be glad of it by 12 on Saturday morning.

In haste

Very truly yours

2 Plowden Buildings Temple
Thursday morning.²³

H. C. Robinson.

article on Goethe's works; that is, in the fourth number of the whole series.

¹⁹ That is, to print a few poems, etc., from Goethe's works.

²⁰ Possibly to determine what character of poems to select.

²¹ In Robinson's *Diary* for April 2, 1832 (II, p. 170), for instance, we note the following: "My nephew called and brought the news of Goethe's death.—I had lying by me three letters for Weimar and Jena and resolved not to alter them, but put them in the post today. They were addressed to *Madame Goethe*, Voigt, and Knebel."

²² Major Karl Ludwig von Knebel (1744-1834), lyric poet and

On the 12th of June, Robinson had sent his second article on Goethe's works to Mr. Fox, together with the text and translation of seven of Goethe's poems. Would Mr. Fox print them? We know the decision and attitude of the editor from the following significant letter by Robinson, written only four days later.

V

Dear Sir

I received your note just as I had finished an anecdotic note about Wieland which (if it ever see the light),²⁴ will be found I think interesting. Intending to travel this summer and calculating that my catalogue will extend through three or four further numbers of half a sheet each, I have gone on with the catalogue without any reference to the order of the volumes (Vols. 5 & 6 I have not in hand as it happens). I had made up my mind to suspend my Italian journey for the sake of reading some of Göthe's works with which I am not familiar, but your letter is calculated to make me abandon all thought of going on with my undertaking.

The poem on which you have passed sentence of condemnation was admired by Mrs. Barbauld²⁵ (or rather 'I should say, the original was admired by her)—you yourself say too that you like it.²⁶ I can

translator. He was undoubtedly Robinson's most intimate German friend.

²³ It has proved impossible to determine the exact date of this note. Granting, however, that the "article" in the last two letters is the same, it follows from the P. S. in the preceding letter that the date is probably later than June, 1832; for Robinson had already received the June copies of his series and probably did not ask for any more until another monthly instalment had appeared. If Robinson actually waited until the "article" was complete, the parcel could not have been sent until after April, 1833, when the series of papers on Goethe was finished. However, the date is not important.

²⁴ A note by Crabb Robinson on Wieland did see the light two years later in *Characteristics of Goethe* by Sarah Austin. See vol. II, pp. 227 ff.

²⁵ Anna Letitia Barbauld, born Aikin (1743-1825). Robinson's diary contains numerous references to her.

²⁶ The condemned poem must have been *Cupid, the Landscape*

imagine but one reason why it should be left out. And that is that the inserting it will injure the Magazine with your readers. If so, and you are a much better judge on that point than I can be, you do quite right in rejecting it. But then you have done wrong in ever asking me to furnish and I should do wrong in a greater degree by continuing what must, I think, be equally unpleasant. No man who can not relish a poetical composition because it is written in a form of verse that he knows not how to read, being quite new,²⁷ and which at first may well appear to be no verse at all—ought to read foreign literature at all. There is a great difference between reading for pleasure, and reading in order to know of what kind a foreign work is. And this latter kind of translation is the only one I have thought myself capable of producing.²⁸

I hope you will oblige me by granting a pardon to the condemned Article. I can put but one construction on your declining to print it, and that I have stated. A consciousness of that is quite enough to disable me from going on with my task. And this not from resentment or ill temper but really from incapacity. It is the same with me in company. I talk willingly in society, and if I am contradicted can carry on an argument polemically with pleasure. But if I see a smile or sneer of contempt, or a person, who I know does not respect me, comes into the room I am silenced at once.

I send the Vol: of Göthe with a reference to the papers from which the text may be copied. There will be less danger of a mistake in the copying.

I am very truly yours

H. C. Robinson

16 June 1832 }
Plowden Buildings }

P: S: You would be more willing to print the 7 I have selected, if you saw the greater number which I have abstained from sending. The hexameters and pentameters I give up unwillingly.

I enclose the account of the 6 Vols: I had written, which however you will send me back. I send them that you may be better able to judge of the expediency of going on with the Series. Do not fear declining the continuation of the articles on account of my feelings. I have been too much accustomed to find my taste on German literature opposed by my friends to be at all hurt by their rejection.

Painter (Amor als Landschaftsmaler), the only poem of the seven submitted which was not printed.

²⁷ *Amor als Landschaftsmaler* is written in the unrhymed trochaic pentameter.

²⁸ Another proof that Robinson did his own translating.

In spite of what Robinson says about personal incapacity, there is no doubt that he is now not only discouraged and well-nigh determined to give up the undertaking, but also indignant at conditions which prompted the editor to refuse a beautiful and inoffensive poem, admired by both Robinson and Fox. To condemn a bit of verse because its form was unknown ²⁹—and it seems inconceivable that it could have been for reasons of content ³⁰—appeared too conservative and trivial. But, on second thought, Robinson was not much astonished, thought better of the matter, and, altho Mr. Fox clung to his original decision, the difficulties were smoothed over and the series continued. A month later Robinson sends his next paper.

VI

16th July [1832]

Dear Sir

I send you an article [for August] which I hope will be acceptable, as I have devoted a good deal of time to it and it comprehends some of the most important of Göthe's works.³¹ So that I have made in fact greater way than I appear to have made.

I cannot well calculate quantities. It is probable that I have sent you more than you will like to use in the present month. If so you will direct the unused copy to be sent back to me.

I hope you are not afraid of the Edinburg Review. I have introduced a pretty sharp attack on it in defence of our friend William

²⁹ I learn that the trochaic pentameter was practically unknown in England in 1832.

³⁰ Could the last lines of *Amor als Landschaftsmaler* give offence, even to an English reader of 1832?

Da nun alles, alles sich bewegte,
Bäume, Flusz und Blumen und der Schleier
Und der zarte Fusz der Allerschönsten;
Glaubt ihr wohl, ich sei auf meinem Felsen,
Wie ein Felsen, still und fest geblieben?

³¹ Such as *Egmont* and *Iphigenia in Tauris*.

Taylor on behalf of whom you will be glad to have a kind word in the Mon[thly] Rep[ository] for he is a *friend* after all, though an odd one.³² I have also expressed my love of Mrs. Barbauld which will be agreeable to most of—nay all your readers. It is one of the pleasures of writing these things that one has an opportunity of gratifying one's best feelings.

In haste

H. C. Robinson

P. S. Since writing the above, I have seen your brother. He tells me you will be glad of an opportunity of letting a kind word of W: Taylor appear in the Magazine. I have sent you all I have written, since the article certainly might end with Iphigenia.³³ It will be perhaps longer than I wish. But to close with Egmont would be perhaps too short.³⁴

The following undated letter, judging from its contents, must have been written about the middle of August, 1832.

³² Robinson was not blind to the shortcomings of William Taylor as a critic, but was ever ready to do him justice for his pioneer work in German literature. Robinson's feeling toward Taylor can best be understood from the initial sentence of Robinson's "defence" (*Monthly Repository* for 1832, p. 517): "The writer of these remarks would deem it a neglect of duty were he to omit so fair an opportunity of expressing his gratitude to Mr. William Taylor of Norwich, who first opened to him the treasures of German literature. It is now nearly forty years since Mr. Taylor's excellent articles in the *Appendices* to the *Monthly Review*, and his admirable translations from Bürger, Wieland, and Goethe gave a direction to his vague studies, and turned the whole course of his future life. These various writings were a few years since collected by Mr. Taylor, and published under the title of an 'Historic Survey of German poetry,' on which an article appeared in the *Edinburgh Review* for March, 1831, written in the bitterest spirit of that mordacious publication.

The author of this article was Thomas Carlyle. He called Taylor's *Survey* a huge, anomalous mass, no section of it like another, oriel-window alternating with rabbit-hole, wrought capital on pillar of dried mud; etc., etc.

³³ This suggestion was followed in the printing.

³⁴ The rest of the P. S. has no bearing on German literature.

VII

Dear Sir

I send you an ample portion for the next [September] number, but it is possible that I may send you some 5 or 6 more slips merely to finish the 11th Vol.³⁵ The 12th Vol. contains Faust. I may find it prudent to dismiss Faust with a line or two, but if I find after studying it that I can say anything tolerable I may make it the matter of an article alone. Göthe condensed all his poetry and all his philosophy in this unique work. There is hardly a topick of religion or philosophy which is not treated but in *such a way!* The Devil being the hero, the style is a sort of sublime burlesque quite inimitable and untranslatable so that I may after all not have the courage to do more than condense a characteristick of it in a few lines.

Perhaps I shall be in London in time to correct the proof for the next month. If so I will send you word. There is very little German luckily. I have written carefully.

If I should by any accident have nothing for you in October,³⁶ you may say in the notice to correspondents that the series will be continued.

By leaving out a part of the last article these two might have easily filled three numbers, but I think after all it is better to bring them within as few numbers as can be.³⁷ They interest more when read in immediate connection and therefore if I can complete what I have lying by me, I think it would be better to lay by a month altogether rather than divide the article into two portions.³⁸

H. C. R.

I will send for the Copies a few days after the beginning of the month.

³⁵ The paper for September, No. 4, as printed, contains only a part of Vol. 9, comprising *Tasso* and *Die natürliche Tochter*. The October number, No. 5, gives a catalogue of volumes 10 and 11. The November number contains *Faust*.

³⁶ Cf. preceding note.

³⁷ The exact references in the beginning of this sentence are not clear, but the general thought is plain.

³⁸ Evidently the portion sent at this time, however, plus an amount sent later "to finish the 11th Vol.," was finally divided into two parts and distributed between the September and October numbers (see note 35). There is no "laying by" until we get to the December number.

Soon "after the beginning of the month," however, there was more trouble pending. The length of the series was threatening to assume greater proportions than had been anticipated by either Robinson or Fox, and the editor, knowing the attitude of his readers, is beginning to feel concerned about the articles. Robinson is now working on *Faust*.

VIII

My dear Sir

Your letter perplexes me exceedingly. I must go down with [William] Pattison³⁹ to Witham tomorrow, and I shall remain there in the country, between Witham Bury and Norwich about a month. What is to be done I do not prophesy. One thing only is certain that it is quite impossible to complete the series in one number after the insertion of *Faust*. The idea might be abandoned altogether of completing the series within the year—you are master of the Magazine and I cannot possibly object to your saying in the next number to correspondents "The series entitled Göthe's works is at the request of some of your friends discontinued." But I cannot consent to this being done after the article on *Faust*.⁴⁰ I do not wish this to be done. I think the preferable course is to print nothing and say nothing this month. Such pauses are frequent in periodical work. There will then be time for our conferring together and my expectation of doing it agreeably to each others feelings is increased by the excellent article I have just been reading on *Subornation of insincerity*.⁴¹ I have never read any thing from your pen to my knowledge, which I have so much enjoyed. Depend upon it I will not suborn you to insincerity by making you afraid of wounding my amour propre, of which I have far less than the unobserving think.

³⁹ An old friend of Robinson, mentioned several times in his diary. In the reminiscences for 1794, "Will" Pattison is cited as a contributor to the *Cabinet*, to which Robinson had contributed his first essay. See *Diary*, I, pp. 15-16.

⁴⁰ Presumably, because it would appear then as if *Faust* were the cause of the discontinuance.

⁴¹ Printed in the October number of the *Monthly Repository* for 1832, pp. 699-705. Since this is the beginning of September, it follows that, unless it was printed elsewhere first,—which is not probable—Robinson must have read it either in manuscript or in proof.

Whenever you favor me with an interview we can come to an understanding about the completion of the series which will I trust be as little injurious to your book as possible. I can shew you I trust that tho' I have miscalculated and certainly deceived myself I have not wilfully misled you.

I wish it was in my power to follow up your idea & by postponing both *Faust* & the *Series of Novels* till the end of the catalogue so finish that this year, and if possible I will do that.

In the meanwhile, send me the Ms: before One tomorrow. If I am not at home let the Ms: be taken to Mr Strutts⁴² chambers above mine. At all events let me hear from you, by the first return of the daily post.

In great haste

Very truly yours

2^d Plowden's Buildings Temple
5th Sept. 1832

H. C. Robinson

Mr. Naylor, if anything be done this month, will be a very good corrector of the proof—his address is S: Naylor Jun 4 Great Newport St. St. Martin's Lane.⁴³

The situation now is somewhat as follows. Fox has urged Robinson to finish the catalogue of Goethe's works, but to do so before the end of the year, if possible. Robinson, realizing more and more the importance and magnitude of his task and the difficulty of greater condensation, sees only two possibilities open: either he must be given sufficient space in the periodical to do the work with some satisfaction, or he will discontinue the series entirely. At the time of writing it looked as tho it would take six numbers of the magazine to cover twelve volumes of Goethe's works, as proved later to be the case, and how were the remaining twenty-eight volumes to be covered in *one* number? But Robinson is willing to talk things over. He remains patient, tho perplexed, and despite a certain

⁴² It is impossible to determine from the manuscript whether this name is *Strutt* or *Shutt*. Both names are mentioned in Robinson's *Diary*, but without the necessary particulars.

⁴³ Cf. next two letters. Samuel Naylor Jr. translated Goethe's *Reineke Fuchs* (1845).

attitude of mind, he caters, as always, to Mr. Fox. Ever ready to throw down his pen, if necessary, he is more ready to go on—for he loves his mission,—tho he does not receive a farthing for his efforts.

In the interim Robinson and Fox must have come to some sort of understanding, for Robinson labored on. On further thought he had decided to devote a whole paper to *Faust*, and on the 11th of September his analysis is ready and is sent to the editor.⁴⁴ But again Robinson hesitates. He thinks of himself, with his usual modesty, and of his uninformed readers, and again questions the advisability of continuing the series. In the beginning of October he urges that the paper on *Faust* be sent back to him.

IX

Dear Sir

If *Faust* be not already in the hands of the printer, would you not send me back the copy? I might make it shorter or we may postpone it a month. Or why not stop where we are? It is probable that few of your readers would inquire why the Series is discontinued. And they who know will be pleased with the discontinuance.

“We know this from the extract of a letter, written Sept. 11, 1832. It has proved impossible thus far to procure or even locate this letter. The following quotation from its contents, however, taken from a catalogue of old manuscripts (No. 266, March 1911, p. 84), published by Maggs Brothers, London, when the letter was still for sale, will, in a measure, bridge the gap between No. VIII and No. IX:—“Brighton, 11th Sept., 1832.

“I send you *Faust*. You may form some idea of the labour it has cost me, by the state of the copy, which however I trust I have left legible at least.”

“*Faust* is so important that *dignitatis causa* I have thought it right to swell the article out so that it may fill up the requisite quantity alone. I was induced to strike out some impudent attacks on the Trinity, from fear of raising clamour against Göthe. What think you of the framing out of it ‘The Witches’ Multiplication Table’ !!”

It would give me real concern to occasion injury to your publication by its containing what is not to their taste. And I very much regret having been drawn on to make the articles so much longer than I intended. The mistake I have fallen into is one too common in those who write to excite much surprise. I fear we have been both in error. You in not recollecting that the great mass of your readers care nothing about German literature; I in thinking myself capable of exciting curiosity, by giving an account of the greatest author of his age, and absolutely new information to the English reader concerning his work. For such a summary of Göthe's works exists nowhere. Your politeness may induce you to reply—"Such a summary may be good anywhere else, only it does not suit my readers." This is all true enough and the only thing to be done is the getting out of the scrape as gently as we can. If you will refer back to my letters you will find you have mistaken what I said about the probable extent of the series if continued. And if you will favour me with a call I will shew you what remains to be done, and the copy I have lying before me. You will then do precisely what you think the interest of your publication requires, which ought to be your only consideration. [After a note of a personal nature, Robinson goes on:]

Had we gone on with the Series, I had found out a friend, a German scholar who would have corrected the sheets. He lives in London and would have prevented the recurrence of such mistakes as have occurred in the two last numbers.⁴⁵ No blame to the corrector excepting in one ludicrous blunder which shews that he corrected without trying to understand the scope of the writing in the word *national* for *natural* l. 3, p. 686.⁴⁶ His name is W S: Naylor⁴⁷ No. 4, Great Newport St. (St. Martin's Lane).

I am very truly yours

2 Plowden Buildings
3rd. Oct. 1832

H. C. Robinson

I have written much more than I intended. My principal object being to request you would send me back the copy of the article about Faust.

⁴⁵ Such as *das unsterbliche*, p. 598; *guschen* for *zu sehen*, p. 604; *Die Fischerinn*, p. 686; *Vorspeil*, p. 688.

⁴⁶ One would hardly call this blunder "ludicrous." Only a German scholar, I think, would ever suspect that *Die Fischerin*, an opera, was performed in the *natural* theater at Tiefurt instead of in the *national*.

⁴⁷ The initial "W" does not appear in the last letter, but there is no doubt about the identity of the man.

The nature of the dilemma is clear. The articles are not being received with any enthusiasm, and yet it seems a pity to stop them. Fox knows little of what remains to be done; but Robinson, with a delicate feeling of apprehension, does know. At first, however, even Robinson had never realized fully the practical difficulties of the undertaking. He had intended to emphasize certain phases of Goethe's writings, which he believed most acceptable to his readers—and to a large extent this plan was carried out—and then, if necessary, to dismiss other works, even masterpieces like *Faust*, "with a line or two." After he had begun work, however, we can easily understand the subsequent developments. Robinson disliked to omit anything entirely and was drawn on by deeper study of the subject-matter, by his own enthusiasm, and by an earnest desire to please all concerned, to "make the articles so much longer than . . . intended" in the beginning. By this time, also, Robinson had adopted a certain scale of relative values with respect to the amount of space to be devoted to the material in the summary. This scale of values ought to be followed in the future in order to give the whole series a certain balance and consistency. But could this same proportion be retained thru the remainder of the analysis without making it tiresome for the readers of the magazine?

However, "the copy of the article about Faust" was, evidently, not sent back; and, more than that, it was undoubtedly printed in its original form; for it occupies fifteen pages of the November number, an important concession to *one* German work by an English periodical of 1832, especially when we consider that the article was not penned by a Coleridge or a Carlyle. In addition, the Rev. Mr. Fox must have urged Robinson at once to proceed with

the catalogue, for the next letter, written only three days later, evinces greater pleasure and satisfaction.

X

My dear Sir

I shall have great pleasure in completing the series as you propose. Your suggestion about publishing in alternate N[umber]s I was about to make myself. Since the articles cannot be finished in one Volume [of the magazine] it will be better to distribute them as you propose.⁴⁸

I shall have no objection before we print No. 7 [in February, 1833] to take your opinion upon the propriety of doing certain things. It shall depend entirely upon yourself whether we make three or six numbers.⁴⁹ Indeed as to the power of extension that is in its nature infinite. For if we include translations the matter is inexhaustible. My present impression is that it will be advisable to bring the matter to a close without inserting the articles on free will, on the Catholic Church, an apology for Göthe's want of patriotism, etc.⁵⁰

Very truly yours

2 Plowden Court Temple
6th October 1832

H. C. Robinson

Mr Naylor has undertaken the correcting of the proofs.

Now there came a pause of several weeks, and for two months, as we have noted, no paper was published on Goethe. But in the beginning of January, in preparation for the February number of the periodical, the editorial see-saw of encouragement and discouragement again makes its appearance. In writing six articles, Robinson had disposed of twelve volumes of Goethe's works. The problem now was how to boil down the contents of the remaining

⁴⁸ This plan was not followed, however. Instead of that, the months of December and January are skipped entirely and the remaining three numbers are published, successively, in February, March, and April.

⁴⁹ Cf. preceding note. Only three numbers were made.

⁵⁰ We learn later that Robinson had written some extra articles during the summer, but by common consent they were not printed. See next letter.

twenty-eight volumes into three short papers. In answer to a suggestion by Mr. Fox, Robinson writes:

XI

Dear Sir

It shall be as you wish. Send me back the copy. I will shorten it,⁵¹ so as to bring into the next No. [7], Vol. 17, the very curious and stimulating *Elective Affinities*. No. 8 [comprising volumes 18-36] shall consist [among other works] of the *Wilhelm Meister* and No. 9 of a catalogue of the remaining [4] vol[ume]s.

I own that it is rather unpleasant to throw away what I wrote in the summer, but it is my own fault. I ought to have been more fully aware of the very little there is in common between the Unitarians and Göthe's, peculiar turn of mind.

My brother himself remarked that the catalogue was too short to be interesting, and yet long enough to tire. For persons who really care about German literature the catalogue as drawn up by me would be interesting, but I am aware that few of your readers belong to that class and you do right in consulting their taste.

One remark I must make in apology for the apparent length and that is that the length after all arises from the anecdotes, which unless I deceive myself are piquant and worth something, and the digressions which are, what they are—all these I will suppress.⁵²

Perhaps when the catalogue is closed, a few independent and distinct articles might be acceptable to your theological and metaphysical readers but I am both too proud and too reasonable to permit you to insert any of these unless you yourself quite approve of them and wish for them.

Very truly yours

H. C. Robinson

11th Jan: 1833

2 Plowden Buildings Temple

⁵¹ Cf. the following extract from an undated, unpublished, supplementary letter which was written, it seems, immediately after this one. I am indebted to a Maggs Brothers catalogue for the extract. See Catalogue No. 269 (Summer, 1911), p. 116. "I [Robinson] sat down to look over my article for this month [February, 1833] with the intention to pare down what I had written, but I found it difficult."

"One long note on German and Italian politics, I could myself have been content to strike out, but was withheld by the reflection that

XII

Dear Sir

I shall have pleasure in writing an account of Mrs [Sarah] Austin's book,⁵³ which indeed comes a propos, just as the series will be closed. In fact, some detailed observations which I have thrown aside will come in here and seem to arise out of the book.

I fully understand and in a great measure concur in what you say about the analysis and catalogue [of Goethe's works]. You will have perceived how rapidly I have gone over the ground lately and I shall do the same in the concluding number. I have shortened by one half what I had written and have left scarcely anything that will not have an interest to all who delight in *moral speculations*.

Do not mistake what I said about G[oethe]'s posthumous writings.⁵⁴ I am too proud to wish that any thing should appear merely to gratify me. Indeed [John] Murray [the publisher] has asked me to supply him with another German article, and after all, I may be gone abroad again before the new books come over. I shall hardly have leisure to write more than two or three articles of any kind.⁵⁵

Do you and do many of your readers read Italian? I was thinking of proposing to you to print with an illustrative commentary two

your magazine, being now distinctly political this note, tho' it has little or nothing to do with G[oethe], may interest your readers."

"The next article for March will consist of two famous works [*Wilhelm Meister* and *Dichtung und Wahrheit*] and the rest may be rapidly got over" . . .

⁵² Cf. preceding note.

⁵³ *Characteristics of Goethe* in three volumes, 1833. Cf. notes 1 and 24, also letter No. XIV.

⁵⁴ In an undated, unpublished letter to Fox from the latter part of February, 1833, Robinson had written: "When the (posthumous) works appear, I will, if you like it, give an account of them, but not unless you like it. For tho' it is unpleasant not to use any material already worked up for use, yet I have not the least care about writing. Unless you had asked me, I had never thought of exercising myself as I have done. But I have had a pleasure in doing it. Not having the ordinary motive for writing, and being little of a party man, I want a stimulus *ab contra* to do anything."

"In the next number 9 there will be an account of Winkelmann, the great Archaeologist"—(See Maggs Brothers catalogue for Oct., 1911, No. 270, p. 61).

⁵⁵ The remainder of the letter does not deal with Goethe, but a part of it is introduced to show Robinson's wide literary interest.

very curious religious ballads which I bought for a half penny off a string near the Vatican. One is a dialogue between Jesus and the woman of Samaria in which the whole Catholic faith nearly is brought out in the most familiar style. In the other, the Virgin Mary has her fortune told by a gypsy. If the Mon[thly] Rep[osi-tory] had retained its theological character⁵⁶ I should have thought the articles very suitable. They are piquant and would be quite new. Tho' the Italian is the easiest imaginable yet I doubt whether you have readers enow for it without a translation. And both original, translation and commentary might be too much. Turn it over in your mind, if you would call on me any morning I would shew you the originals.

In haste

1st March 1833

H. C. Robinson

We see in this letter that Robinson's services were still in demand, in spite of the vicissitudes encountered while writing the articles on Goethe's works. Robinson's acquaintance with German affairs was still acknowledged by both editor and publisher, and since the papers on Goethe had, after all, been presented to the subscribers of the *Monthly Repository* with extraordinary tactfulness, the editor ventured to suggest another paper, a review of Mrs. Austin's book on Goethe. The original series is completed on March thirteenth.

XIII

My dear Sir

I send you the last number, which I have taken more pains with than with any other, and with difficulty reduced to less than a sheet. It contains more *glimpses* of curious and interesting literature⁵⁷ than have often been compressed within so few pages.

By the bye: Did I ever recommend to your particular attention the two works of the Schlegels mentioned in this number?⁵⁸ If not,

⁵⁶ The periodical had by this time assumed a more distinct literary and political character. Cf. note 7.

⁵⁷ Such as *Hermann und Dorothea* and *Reineke Fuchs*.

⁵⁸ A. W. Schlegel, *Lectures on the Drama*; F. Schlegel, *Lectures on the History of Literature*. Cf. *Monthly Repository* for 1833, p. 281,

let me do so now. Ch[ief] Justice Gibbs, a medallist at Oxford, told me he had learned more from Schlegel about French literature than he had learned from all other books put together.

Truly yours,

13th March 1833

H. C. Robinson

2 Plowd[en] Buildings

In June of the same year we have further correspondence about Mrs. Austin's book.

XIV

Rydal Mount 18th June 1833.

My dear Sir

Your brother [Charles] must have forgotten or misunderstood my message when I called on him just before my departure for Scotland. I told him of my intended journey. And that, therefore, if you wished for an immediate notice of Mrs Austin's book it would be necessary to apply to some other person.

It is true, I have a copy of the book here but that alone is not sufficient to enable me to write as I should wish upon it. As I cannot flatter myself with being able by mere observation and criticism to render my article interesting I must try to insert some *matter* into it which may supply the want of form and I particularly wish to connect this with the former articles. By the bye Mrs. A[ustin] would have avoided committing several errors of fact if she had had those articles before her when she wrote (I mean those which were already printed). There is a remarkable coincidence in sentiment and thought between the Monthly Repository writer⁵⁹ and the German essayists,⁶⁰ but this I must leave others to point out.⁶¹ In other

note. Robinson refers to these works as follows: "A. W. Schlegel's 'Lectures on the Drama,' which contain the most admirable development that has ever appeared of the excellences of Shakespeare. F. Schlegel's 'Lectures on the History of Literature,' a work more highly esteemed in Germany, but more metaphysical and less popular than the book of his brother."

⁵⁹ That is, Robinson.

⁶⁰ Presumably such men as Falk and von Müller, from whom Mrs. Austin procured most of her material.

⁶¹ With the material in the last two sentences, compare the following extract from the first paragraph in Robinson's review: "We

respects, Mrs A[ustin]'s book forestalls me by having now given to the public the substance of what I had intended somehow or other to promulgate. I should have preferred publishing all I had to say in the Mon[thly] Rep[ository] but that would have been an over-dose for your readers. So Mrs A[ustin] has had the overflowings.

On my return in Autumn, if then not too late I shall be happy to frame an article.⁶² And I suggested to Mrs A[ustin] that possibly then it may serve to keep alive, tho within a small circle, attention to the book. Yet it may be doubted whether if *all* your readers relish the sentiments of Junius Redivivus⁶³—whose last article on the Coronors Inquest is outrageous—it may not be expedient to decline altogether eulogizing the most conservative of poets.

Very truly yours,

H. C. Robinson

As we have seen, the review of Mrs. Austin's work was in due time written and published. This completed the papers on Goethe and made one strong, final appeal for the German poet, an appeal which in many respects was a eulogy. As in his correspondence with Fox, Robinson, in his review, is constantly harping on English ignorance of things German, and betrays the necessity of a cautious catering to the English public, which was characteristic of the time. The English are but "imperfectly acquainted" with Goethe's works, and if Mrs. Austin's book does not succeed, it is because of "the want of a prepared public." It is all new; Mrs. Austin must create a taste for the German poet; and it "requires courage and virtue

shall practice the self-denial of leaving unnoticed the coincidences in opinion which we have had the pleasure of remarking, where there could have been no interchange of thought; and the few discrepancies of statement are not important enough to occupy space that may be more agreeably filled by extracts" (*Monthly Repository* for March, 1834, p. 177).

⁶² It has proved impossible thus far to determine the exact date of composition, but it was printed the following March. Cf. preceding note.

⁶³ William Bridges Adams (1797-1872), a red-hot radical and writer on political subjects, evidently the polar-opposite of Goethe.

to write that which is known will not and cannot please the general reader." Robinson himself is both honest and diplomatic in calling attention to his great Weimar friend, and shows that he understood both the German poet and the English mind and temperament. Says Robinson in this review: "Goethe was neither a warrior nor an adventurer, but the first of German poets and thinkers." He called attention to the many-sidedness of Goethe and showed how he could not be patriotic in the narrow sense. Good permanent results, even in politics, must come from within and not by revolutionary violence; Goethe could not be "the mouth-piece of a party." And to make a good impression upon his readers, Robinson emphasizes the moral and religious speculations in Goethe's writings and incidentally discusses pre-existence and the transmigration of souls. Surely this ought to appeal even to the more Puritanic mind! To Robinson, Goethe was a plain, practical man who did not "fret at disappointments," but made the best of things as they were.

Thus Robinson labored, and he continued thereafter to labor, tho in a different way, for the cause of German literature in England. Surely, Germany owes much to Henry Crabb Robinson for his sincere and untiring efforts to make Goethe appreciated among Englishmen.

ADOLPH B. BENSON.